

Dorchester Reporter

“The News and Values Around the Neighborhood”

2021 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: BACKGROUND

1. **What is your name, age, place of birth and present address?**
 - a. Ruthzee Louijeune
 - b. Born: Mattapan
 - c. Reside: Hyde Park
2. **What is your present occupation? Also, please note any past employment that may be relevant to your candidacy.**
 - a. Current Employment: Attorney and advocate
 - b. Past Employment: Served as Senior Counsel on Senator Elizabeth Warren’s Presidential and Senate Campaign
3. **Please detail your personal educational background and achievements.**
 - a. Boston Public Schools, Columbia University, Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and Harvard Law School
4. **Please list some of your affiliations with non-profits, civic associations and political groups.**
 - a. Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association
 - b. Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance
 - c. The Guild Works
 - d. Warren Alumni Network
5. **What in your experience to date will most help you to be an effective leader?**
 - a. I am qualified to hold office because of my commitment to Boston, the diverse and struggling communities I represent, and my commitment to hit the ground running on the issues that working class Bostonians are facing. I’ve always been about my community. I’ve represented tenants and homeowners facing displacement in Boston Housing Court, often Haitian residents facing language barriers. I ran a weekly eviction clinic to help tenants without legal representation complete paperwork to preserve their legal rights. I’ve worked on an education committee in City Hall to improve education outcomes for all our students when I was just a student, appointed to the committee by Mayor Menino. I worked at the Posse Foundation on issues of higher education access and equity for our Boston kids and kids across the country. I worked as the Senior Counsel for Senator Warren’s presidential and Senate campaigns advocating for progressive values, and I’ve been a member, activist, and attorney with community groups to solve the city’s systemic issues of affordable housing, homeownership, and food insecurity. I’m excited to bring my perspective, skills, and deep passion for the city to my work as the first Haitian person elected to Boston City Council.
6. **What are the three accomplishments you’re most proud of?**
 - a. I testified before Boston City Council and the Attorney General’s office about a downtown business’s discriminatory practices denying business to me and my friends. A fine was levied against the business, we

received an apology, and the employees were forced to attend antidiscrimination programming. This is all part of the work that is needed to ensure a city that feels welcoming and inclusive to all.

- b. I've worked on racial gerrymandering and voting rights cases that made their way to the Supreme Court, working to expand the right to vote and to ensure that Black communities had representation of their choice.
- c. Being a member and leader in my very large Haitian extended family. I'm incredibly proud of what I've been able to accomplish because of the sacrifice of my parents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and village of community members who helped raise me, and I believe in paying that forward.

7. Are you a member of a union?

- a. No but my mother, now a retired nurse assistant, was a member of 1199SEIU, my older sister is a member of AFSCME Council 93, and my oldest sister is currently working to negotiate a contract with the Teamsters to get a local up and running in her workplace.

8. Please list any endorsements to date.

- a. Senator Elizabeth Warren
- b. State Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz
- c. State Representative Jay Livingstone
- d. Judge Leslie Harris
- e. Former State Representative Marie St. Fleur
- f. State Representative Liz Miranda
- g. State Representative Adrian Madaro
- h. State Senator Joe Boncore
- i. City Councilor Lydia Edwards
- j. City Councilor Kenzie Bok
- k. City Councilor Ricardo Arroyo
- l. Boston Teachers Union
- m. Mass Nurses Association
- n. Greater Boston Labor Council
- o. UAW Region 9A
- p. Firefighters Local 718
- q. IBEW Local 2222
- r. IBEW Local 103
- s. SEIU NAGE
- t. SEIU 888
- u. Run for Something
- v. MWPC
- w. Sierra Club
- x. Sunrise Boston
- y. Mass NOW PAC
- z. Progressive West Roxbury/ Roslindale
- aa. JP Progressives
- bb. VOTEPROCHOICE
- cc. Pressley Policy Pledge
- dd. Ward 4
- ee. Ward 5
- ff. Ward 10
- gg. Ward 15
- hh. Ward 21

Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS

1. **What is your party affiliation and how would you characterize your political ideology?**
 - a. Democrat
2. **Please name up to three (and at least one) of your political role models? Please feel free to explain your choices.**
 - a. Robert Louijeune - my father, a model for what it means to show up for and be in community, and to care deeply about your neighbor.
 - b. Marie St. Fleur - oftentimes you can't be what you can't see. I had the privilege of interning for Marie at the State House when she was a representative. Needless to say, seeing a Haitian-American woman stand up for our community left an incredible impact on me.
 - c. Karilyn Crockett - gave me my first job as a walking tour guide at MYTOWN. Exposed me to the city's rich and diverse city and gave me a sense of ownership over solving the city's problems. Taught me the most important power is everyday people power through broad cross-class & cross-racial coalitions.
3. **Are you in favor of term limits for the seat you are seeking? If so, how many terms?**
 - a. Yes, I would support changing the city charter to impose term limits for office in Boston. 4 terms.
4. **What would you do to increase voter turnout in the city of Boston? Do you favor same-day voter registration or lowering the voting age to 16? Do you favor mail-in voting?**
 - a. I support same-day voter registration and I am in favor of giving 16 and 17 year olds the ability to vote in municipal elections. I also support a no excuse vote by mail option.
5. **Do you think that Boston should adopt a rank-choice voting system in upcoming election cycles?**
 - a. Yes. I would support a charter change to adopt rank-choice voting in Boston.

Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

1. **What is your top priority if elected?**
 - a. My top three priorities are housing, education, and access to city contracting dollars. My plan to address housing includes efforts to close the racial wealth gap and create wealth and community stability among working class families through a) first-generation homeownership grant-based programs targeted to communities that historically experienced blockbusting and redlining; b) increasing payments and advancing timing of payments made to city by commercial and residential developers to fund affordable housing and homeownership; and c) using more public land for the development of affordable housing and homeownership.

When it comes to education, I would a) support a hybrid or fully elected school committee; b) robust funding for pre-K and early college access programs for high school students; c) more emotional and tangible support for students experiencing homelessness; d) extended support and smaller classrooms for underperforming schools and vulnerable populations.

Finally, in regards to city contracts, only 1.2% of Boston city contracts went to Black, Latinx, and women-owned businesses. This is an embarrassing statistic that must jolt us into action. As a lawyer and advocate, I will be ready to fight for small businesses and equitable access to city resources. I would work to a) Break down contracts to make small, local, women, Black, and LatinX businesses more competitive in the procurement process; b) Given the recent disparity study, Boston has the legal basis to increase procurement goals for minority and women owned businesses; Increase supplier diversity by looking at the success Massport had with supplier diversity with Seaport projects; and c) Offer technical assistance to help complete RFPs to small and local businesses in low-income communities.

2. How will you approach the issue of gun violence in our communities?

- a. I would prioritize allocating more public safety resources to non-profit organizations that work on mental health, trauma from violence, and poverty to help prevent crime. For example, I would seek to work with Violence in Boston, We are Better Together Foundation, Louis D. Peace Institute, Justice 4 Housing, and Families for Justice as Healing - all lead by BIPOC women. Often in instances of state sanctioned violence, mass shootings, or street violence, the perpetrator has a history of intimate partner violence. I support allocating resources to domestic violence organizations and nonprofits supporting emotional competency. By supporting the groups that provide tools and resources to men to promote emotional vulnerability and address trauma, we are in turn promoting the health of our communities more broadly. Organizations currently engaged in this work are Casa Myrna, the Violence Intervention Advocacy Program at BMC, My Brother's Keeper, the Guild Works, and a host of others.

3. Is there a specific city agency you see as in need of urgent reform? If so, please explain.

- a. The BPDA is one of the biggest barriers to affordable housing. The BPDA/BRA is not community-driven. It has a developer-driven policy, coupled with a history of displacement. Boston is an anomaly when compared to other big cities that have an independent planning office and process. Combining planning and development within the BRA/BPDA creates a major conflict of interest that tilts incredibly in favor of developers. The community process that does exist within the BRA/BPDA is often a condescending rubber stamp. I've been to BRA and BPDA public hearings. BPDA does not truly value resident concerns in the development process, and they don't ensure a feedback loop to actually address residents' concerns. There are not enough banks offering affordable mortgage products like the ONE & ONE+ Boston programs. There is a lack of enabling authority from the state to regulate development of luxury builds. Politicians often lack the political will to fight for the needs of working class residents, and they kowtow to the desires of developers. It's critical to elect leaders with the backbone to fight for everyday residents. Historically, zoning codes have been used as a tool of exclusion. Our zoning code needs updating to increase how quickly and

easily residents and affordable housing advocates can develop housing, especially multifamily housing. The ZBA must be reimaged to remove conflict of interests that lead to an onslaught of special approvals and variances. Wages are not keeping up with housing costs. Accordingly, even when affordable housing is created, it is often unaffordable to people in Boston's most low-income neighborhoods because the city uses a citywide Area Median Income ("AMI") to determine eligibility, which is often much higher than the AMI of those neighborhoods. The city is limited in its revenue streams, and relies heavily on property taxes as a revenue base. This often leads to a blind greenlighting of development projects.

4. **What is your position on residency, i.e. requiring people hired by the municipal government to live in the city of Boston?**
 - a. I support the BRJP and its enforcement.
5. **The city of Boston presently owns and manages the historic Strand Theater in Uphams Corner. How would you seek to program, market and utilize this asset?**
 - a.
6. **What is your position on vaccinations? Should students be required to be vaccinated for Covid-19 to attend school in Boston?**
 - a. I fully support vaccinations and vaccine mandates except in the rare circumstance that a doctor advises against taking it (for example, for someone who is immuno-compromised).
7. **Do you favor a return to an elected School Committee? Please explain.**
 - a. I support a hybrid or fully elected school committee. A hybrid structure allows for power-sharing and greater accountability, while accounting for the issue of low name-recognition in municipal elections. I am open to a fully elected school committee.
8. **Do you support the recent decision of the BPS and School Committee to alter the admission plan for the city's three exam schools?**
 - a. Yes
9. **Do you support the citywide ballot question that would hand new budgetary powers to the City Council?**
 - a. Yes
10. **The city of Boston is presently without a permanent police commissioner. What should the next mayor do to fill the position and what type of person should be selected to lead the BPD?**
 - a.
11. **Do you support the redevelopment of City Hall and City Hall Plaza?**
 - a. Yes, down the road, but it's not a priority.
12. **What is your assessment of the Climate Ready Boston initiative conceived and executed to date by the Walsh administration? Is this initiative a sufficient response to prepare for the anticipated climate change in coming years and decades? What else might you do to build climate resiliency in the city of Boston?**
 - a. At the city level, we need to double down on our environmental justice investments by looking at what the city has control over: public transportation, urban spaces, disposable good regulations, and building energy requirements. All of these initiatives and others should have a central focus of job creation and equitable investment, targeting the areas of the city hardest hit by climate change.
There are several ways we as a city can invest in adaptation to a changing climate. One primary example includes our urban spaces. We need to grow the tree canopy in urban spaces and continue making

Boston Harbor more resilient by ensuring flood protection-- particularly in neighborhoods that have been under-invested in. We also need to install green infrastructure such as rooftop solar arrays, cisterns, rain gardens, permeable pavements, and restore wildlands and wetlands.

We need to support people displaced by climate change by granting TPS status to climate refugees, and then creating a pathway to citizenship. As a daughter of Haitian immigrants, I support federal efforts for an inclusive path to citizenship for our DREAMers, TPS holders, and asylum speakers. So many residents in Boston, including members of my own family, would benefit from a federal overhaul of the immigration process that provided a clearer, more affordable path to citizenship. Until this federal overhaul is realized, Boston should continue to act as a sanctuary home to anyone displaced by climate change. We need to continue to expand language access and inclusion in our city. Immigrants face biases such as accent bias, and we need to do a better job of promoting the fact that having an accent is not a demarcation for someone's intelligence and ability to do a job. I will also push to make sure we are paying non-profit immigrant organizations--whether through grants or direct payments--for the work we ask them to do regarding community outreach for city services.

13. A millionaires tax is expected to be on the statewide ballot in 2022. How do you plan to vote?

- a. Yes

14. Should gig workers be considered company employees, rather than independent contractors?

- a. I believe that gig workers should have the right to organize collectively as employees. Big corporations are profiting off of their lack of ability to collectively bargain for fair wages, health care, and other employment benefits. It is crucial that they be able to organize so that they are no longer threatened by rate cuts and unhealthy working conditions.

15. A report commissioned by the Walsh administration found that just 1.2 percent of city contracts awarded between 2014-2018 were awarded to Black or Latino-owned businesses. What would you do to change that?

- a. Only 1.2% of Boston city contracts going to Black and Latinx businesses is an embarrassing statistic that must jolt us into action. As a lawyer and advocate, I will be ready to fight for small businesses and equitable access to city resources. As city councilor I would work to:
 - i. Break down contracts to make small, local, Black, and LatinX businesses more competitive in the procurement process. Given the recent disparity study, Boston has the legal basis to increase procurement goals for minority and women owned businesses. I would institute a target of 25% for BIPOC-owned businesses, with a target of 15% to Black-owned businesses.
 - ii. Reduce barriers to entry by simplifying RFP process
 - iii. Have more diverse staff deciding on city contracts
 - iv. Reduce favoritism towards long-established companies
 - v. Working with the Equity Cabinet; require each city department to conduct assessment of future needs for goods and services, and partnering with and communicating city procurement opportunities in outreach efforts to small businesses.

- vi. Create a supplier diversity program
 - vii. Learn lessons from the Omni Hotel Project, where MassPort succeeded in contracting with BIPOC-owned business
 - viii. Require Regular public reporting and assessment of whether targets are being met
- 16. In 2018, the Walsh administration set a goal of creating 69,000 new units of housing in Boston by 2030. What is your assessment of this target — and what would your office do to balance growth with the concerns that many have about displacement in neighborhoods like Dorchester?**
- a.
- 17. What is your assessment of the Walsh administration’s overall performance? Please offer a letter grade or pass/fail as part of your answer.**
- a.
- 18. What is your assessment of the acting Mayor Kim Janey’s performance since taking office in March 2021? Please offer a letter grade or pass/fail as part of your answer.**
- a.
- 19. Will you seek to expand or change the composition of the Zoning Board of Appeals? If so, how?**
- a. Yes I will seek to change the composition of the ZBA by making it more diverse and more inclusive of community voices. I would also implement term limits and look into limiting the revolving door between industry and regulation to limit conflict of interest.
- 20. When not on the campaign trail, how do you unwind?**
- a. When not campaigning I can be found hiking, biking, and scooting in Blue Hills, the Neponset Trail, Jamaicaaway, or along Southwest Corridor Park. You can also find me running with TrailBlazHers Running Co. with my sister, bringing my nieces and nephews to Franklin Park Zoo. I also frequent many local restaurants.
- 21. If you were not a candidate, who would you support in this election for either Mayor or City Council?**
- a.